

Objection Period Bitterroot National Forest

The Bitterroot National Forest is re-initiating a 45-day objection period to allow individuals or organizations to submit objections to certain designations made in the Bitterroot Travel Plan concerning mountain biking within the Sapphire and Blue Joint Wilderness Study Areas (collectively "WSAs"). This objection period is in response to the recent United States District Court decision from Judge Dana Christensen in *Bitterroot Ridge Runners Snowmobile Club et al v. United States Forest Service et al.* The court ordered the Forest Service to conduct an objection response period regarding closure of trails within the WSAs to bicycles.

The Record of Decision (ROD), final environmental impact statement (FEIS), and other supporting documentation related to the Bitterroot Travel plan are available for review at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=21183>. Additional information regarding this action can be obtained from Amy Fox, Environmental Coordinator, 1801 N. First St., Hamilton, MT, 59840 or at 406-363-7100.

Please note that the consideration of objections is strictly limited to the closure of the Sapphire and Blue Joint Wilderness Study Areas to mountain biking; no other issues will be considered during this objection period. Please refer to pages 24 and 25 of the ROD for the decision maker's rationale for the closures of the WSAs to mechanized transport.

The court also asked the Forest Service to clarify the miles of trails closed within the WSAs. Page 9 of the ROD states, "Motorized/mechanical transport, including bicycles, will be prohibited in the Sapphire and Blue Joint Wilderness Study Areas for both summer and over-snow use. This will include the closure of Trail #39 (Chain of Lakes) to these uses." The ROD further states, on page 12, that the decision will "result in the prohibition of bicycles from approximately 68 miles of recommended wilderness areas (RWAs) and approximately 110 miles in... WSAs." In calculating the miles of closures with the WSAs (p. 12 of the ROD), the Forest Service inadvertently omitted the two-track mileage of Trail 39 (3.35 miles) and Trail 313.5 (6.8 miles). Therefore, the total mileage closed to bicycles is approximately 121 miles. All closures were analyzed and accounted for in the FEIS (Chapter 3.3 and Appendix I) and ROD despite this omission. The approximately 121 miles of closures with the WSAs includes 22.3 miles of overlap with trails within the recommended wilderness portion of the Blue Joint WSA.

The table below clarifies what trails are closed within the WSAs and their mileage (from Appendix I of the FEIS).

Blue Joint WSA		Sapphire WSA	
Trail Number	Miles	Trail Number	Miles
106 - Razorback Ridge	12.6	102 - Mosquito Meadows	1.1
137 - Jack the Ripper ¹	3	156 - Weasel Creek	1.7
138 - Chicken Creek	5.7	168 - Moose Creek	5.1
139 - Deer Creek	12.5	313.2 - Bitterroot Rock Cr. Divide N. end of MWSA to Trail 102	22.8
183 - Bare Cone	2.6	313.5 - Bitterroot Rock Cr. Divide Junction Trail 102 to FR 80	7.81
223 - Little Blue Joint	4.3	39 - Chain of Lakes	3.35
602 - Deer Creek Point	2.8	40 - Sign Creek	5.6
614 - Blue Joint ¹	14.7	420 - Sula Fish Lake	0.6
627 - Castle Rock ¹	4.6	421 - Faith Lake	1.8
	Total 62.8	503 - Skalkaho-Jerry Lake	3.8
		77 - Railroad Creek	2.1
		83 - Kent Lake	0.7
		87 - Skalkaho-Sleeping Child Divide	1.3
		Total	57.76

1. Also within recommended wilderness

Mailed, emailed, faxed, or hand-delivered objections concerning this issue will be accepted for 45 calendar days following the publication of this notice. Objections must be received by November 19, 2018.

If you already submitted an objection during the period that started on August 22, 2018, you **do not** need to resubmit your objection.

Objections mailed or hand-delivered must be submitted to the reviewing officer at:

Objection Reviewing Officer
USDA Forest Service
26 Fort Missoula Road
Missoula, MT 59804

Hand-delivered objections must be delivered between 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. weekdays, excluding holidays.

Electronic objections must be submitted to: appeals-northern-regional-office@fs.fed.us with "Bitterroot Travel Plan Objection" in the subject line. Electronic objections must be submitted in a format that is readable with optical character recognition software (e.g. Word, PDF, Rich Text) and be searchable. An automated response will confirm that your electronic objection has been received.

Faxed objections must be faxed to the Objection Reviewing Officer at: (406) 329-3411. Please include "Bitterroot Travel Plan Objection" in the subject line.

All objections must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 218.8(d) and must include the following information:

- 1) Objector's name and address as defined in § 218.2, with a telephone number, if available;
- 2) Signature or other verification of authorship upon request (a scanned signature for electronic mail may be filed with the objection);
- 3) When multiple names are listed on an objection, identification of the lead objector as defined in § 218.2. Verification of the identity of the lead objector must be provided upon request or the reviewing officer will designate a lead objector as provided in § 218.5(d);
- 4) The name of the proposed project, the name and title of the responsible official, and the name(s) of the national forest(s) and/or ranger district(s) on which the proposed project will be implemented;
- 5) A description of those aspects of the proposed project addressed by the objection, including specific issues related to the proposed project; if applicable, how the objector believes the environmental analysis or decision specifically violates law, regulation, or policy; suggested remedies that would resolve the objection; supporting reasons for the reviewing officer to consider.

The publication date of this public notice is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an objection. Objectors must not rely on dates or timeframe information provided by any other source (36 CFR 218.6(c)). It is the responsibility of the objector to ensure that the reviewing officer receives the objection in a timely manner. The regulations prohibit extending the length of the objection filing period. **Objections must be received by November 19, 2018.**

RR #20550873 October 3, 2018